



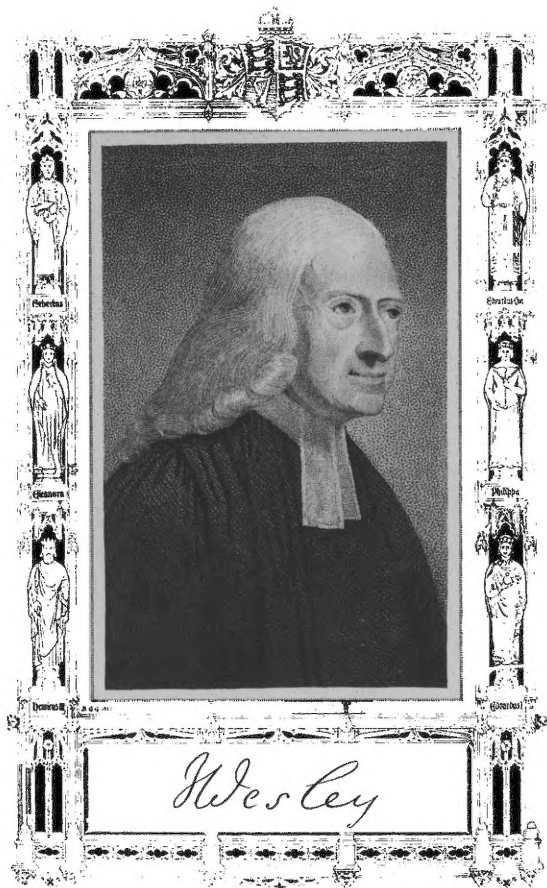
THE WESTMINSTER BIOGRAPHIES

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JOHN WESLEY

BY

FRANK BANFIELD



The  
**Westminster  
Biographies**



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# J O H N W E S L E Y

BY

FRANK BANFIELD



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## PREFACE.

*No new facts about John Wesley are likely to be brought to light. He left abundant materials for his biographers in his journals, and his volumes of sermons are sufficiently exhaustive and clear as to the substance of his religious opinions. One of Wesley's great merits was his lucidity in thought, speech, and style, so that he is not a man whose obscurity in expression might generate mistakes about him. Moreover, he admitted the world into the secrets of the inner motions of his soul and mind as far as he was able. In a word, there is no new thing, in the literal sense, to be learned about Wesley. My endeavour, therefore, has been confined to giving the story of his life as clearly and interestingly as my limits of space would permit. With this purpose in front of me, I selected my matter ; and, as far as possible, in the more important crises of his life I have allowed Wesley to be his own biographer.*

*Though there may be nothing new in the way of facts to learn about Wesley, it does not follow that the facts themselves may not be susceptible of other constructions than those which writers in the past have put on them. For example, in the earlier biographies of him, prejudice has worked more strongly than it need do to-day, when the founder of Methodism of the Arminian variety has been in the grave a hundred and eight years. To his admirers he was, for all practical purposes, without fault; and, by taking his sermons as a standard by which all doctrine must be judged, they seemed to suggest that in matters of faith he was infallible, and that his pulpit utterances were the outcome of a direct divine inspiration. The late Mr. Robert Southey in his *Life* expressed the moderate Anglican view of his time. Here the most serious criticism of the Methodist movement may be summed up as a deprecation of what is called "enthusiasm." But, for critics of this type, any serious, earnest concern of*

*the individual in the matter of his eternal destiny would appear to deserve such qualification. Wesley unquestionably was the means of exciting deep concern in thousands and tens of thousands of English men and women. Many of these men and women were people in the lower social strata, possessing no great worldly advantages, educational or other ; and, naturally, they would manifest strong religious feeling in ways not congenial to superfine people, who could understand a human being who was disturbed over a bad dinner, but not if he was disquieted about his soul. They regarded it as a disagreeable phenomenon. I have heard that even in the present day the Archbishop of Canterbury bade a perplexed and anxious parson "go home and take a pill." For myself, I do not regard this medical and physiological type of critic as more satisfying than the Methodist idolater or than that admirer of Whitefield who, failing to see or hear his great preacher because of the throng, consoled himself with*

*the reflection that he had seen "his blessed wig."*

*Then there are the critics of the more agnostic type, who find a solution of the problem presented by a great moral and religious movement in the catch-phrases of the materialistic psychology, which enjoys so much popularity just now. I have no space to enter into controversy with these ladies and gentlemen. I am not sure that their pipings in the market-place are entirely reassuring to themselves. They have not commended themselves to my mind while putting this life together.*

*Wesley was a man of limitations, but without those limitations of mind and character he would not have accomplished the work he did. To dominate the serious middle-class intelligence of the eighteenth century, he was admirably adapted. The proof of his adaptation is in his achievement. He was, I take it, in a specially manifest way, an instrument of Providence; and this is further shown by the fact that so*

*many of the earnest men who have been prominent in the great religious revival of the nineteenth century are the lineal descendants of those who in the eighteenth were identified with the general Methodist movement. Wesley helped materially in the gradual lifting of Anglo-Saxondom out of the Paganism in which it was wallowing part of the way on the road back towards a perfect Christianity. He is plainly a man of whom every educated person should have some knowledge ; and I hope I have succeeded in telling his story, in comparatively few words, fairly, squarely, and readably.*

FRANK BANFIELD.



## CHRONOLOGY.

1703

*June* 17. John Wesley born.

1707 (end of)

Charles Wesley born.

1709

Fire at Epworth rectory.

1714

John Wesley goes to the Charterhouse.

George Whitefield born.

1716-17

*December 2-end of January.* Epworth ghost.

1720

John Wesley goes up to Christchurch, Oxford.

1725

*September* 19. Ordained deacon.

1726

*March* 17. Elected Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford.

Charles Wesley goes up to Christchurch, Oxford, from Westminster School.



1727-29

*August*, 1727-*November*, 1729. Curate to his father at Wroote, Epworth.

1728

*September* 22. Ordained priest.

1729

John Wesley becomes "Father of the Holy Club."

1732

Whitefield servitor at Pembroke College.

1733 (*circa*)

John Wesley makes William Law's acquaintance.

1735

*April* 25. The Rev. Samuel Wesley, John's father, died.

Charles Wesley ordained.

*October* 14. John and Charles Wesley sail from Gravesend for Georgia.

1736

Charles Wesley returns.

1738

*February* 1. John returns to England, landing at Deal. George Whitefield leaves for Georgia.

## CHRONOLOGY

xv

1738 (*continued*)

Wesley's conversion and visit to the Moravians at Herrnhut.

*Summer.* Whitefield returns from Georgia.

1739

*February* 17. Whitefield begins field preaching.

Wesley begins field preaching.

Whitefield returns to Georgia.

*May* 12. Stone of first Methodist meeting-house laid.

1740

Wesley's breach with the Moravians.

1740-48

Wesley separates from Whitefield on predestination. Breach with Calvinists.

1740-90

Period of Wesley's itinerant preaching.

1741-45

Opposition and violence of mobs and magistrates to itinerant preaching.

1742

*July.* Susannah Wesley, John's mother, dies.

1744

*June 25.* First Methodist Conference.

1748

Whitefield returns from Georgia.

1751

John Wesley marries Mrs. Vazeille.

1768

Regular Methodist society formed in  
New York, U.S.

1770

Whitefield dies at Newburyport, Penn.

1777

*April 1.* Foundation stone of City Road  
Chapel laid.

1784

Legal settlement of Conference effected.  
*September 2.* Wesley ordains Dr. Coke  
a bishop, and so founds Methodist Epis-  
copal Church.

1788

*March 29.* Charles Wesley died.

1791

*March 2.* John Wesley died.

JOHN WESLEY



## JOHN WESLEY.

### I.

THE great religious movement of the eighteenth century known as the Evangelical Revival has been largely identified in the popular mind with the person of John Wesley. Neither he nor Whitefield, with whom during his early career as a field preacher he was so intimately associated, was the creator of that movement, but they were certainly its two most impressive personalities; and the man who is not uncommonly alluded to as "the founder of Methodism" fills a universally recognised place of importance among the great figures in the historical development of the Anglo-Saxon character. The Evangelical Revival of the last century has exerted influence outside the separate religious organisations which were its direct outcome, and was indubitably the forerunner of that great movement

with which religiously the nineteenth century is associated, which made itself first manifest at Oxford some twenty years after the battle of Waterloo. The great communions of Methodists in this country, in the colonies, and in the United States, who still look to Wesley as their doctrinal teacher, must, if their merely nominal adherents are taken into account, number some millions at least. It is not necessary, therefore, to offer any apology for including so great a name in the biographies of this series.

To form a just appreciation of his work and of the incidents which marked its inception, it is important to know something of the moral condition of England at the early part of the eighteenth century. William III. died in 1702, and Wesley was born in the following year. Now Bishop Burnet, who was the Prince of Orange's companion in his successful entry into England in 1688, wrote as follows of clerical can-

didates in 1713, when Wesley would be ten years old :—

Our ember weeks are the burden and grief of my life. The much greater part of those who come to be ordained are ignorant to a degree not to be apprehended by those who are not obliged to know it. The easiest part of knowledge is that to which they are the greatest strangers: I mean the plainest parts of the Scriptures. They can give no account, or at least a very imperfect one, of the contents of the gospels or of the catechism itself.

Englishmen are, not without reason, proud of the general respect shown in this country at the present time to the first day of the week. Yet in the early part of the eighteenth century it was not so. Here, for instance, is the testimony of the Bishop of Lichfield, preaching in 1724 before the Society for the Reformation of Manners. He said :—

The Lord's Day is now the devil's market day. More lewdness, more drunkenness, more quarrels and murders, more sin is contrived and committed on this day than on all the other



days of the week together. Strong liquors are become the epidemic of this great city. More of the common people die of consumptions, fevers, dropsies, cholics, palsies, and apoplexies, contracted by the immoderate use of brandies and distilled waters, than of all distempers besides arising from other causes. Sin in general is grown so hardened and rampant as that immoralities are defended, yea, justified on principle. Obscene, wanton, and profane books find so good a market as to encourage the trade of publishing them. Every kind of sin has found a writer to teach and vindicate it, and a book-seller and hawker to divulge and spread it.

If it may be thought that the bishops were professionally predisposed to accentuate the situation, we have the concurrent testimony of Montesquieu on his visit to England. "In the higher circles," said the French writer, "every one laughs if one talks of religion." Most of the prominent politicians of the time rejected Christianity altogether, while they were remarkable for coarseness and immorality. It affected Walpole's popularity not one whit that he

was both foul-mouthed and drunken, while a successor of his in the premier-ship appeared habitually with his mistress at the play. There is testimony in abundance that the deterioration which had been dehumanising England for several generations had now reached its nadir. As to the lower orders, apart from a swift and bestial drunkenness, their amusements consisted entirely in tormenting animals. Bear-baiting and bull-baiting were the most widely patronised amusements of the populace. Cock-throwing, which consisted in battering to death a cock tied to a stake, disgraced every Shrove Tuesday. On this subject there occurs in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1737 the following suggestive plaint : —

How many warm disputes and bloody quarrels has it not occasioned among the surrounding mob? How many arms, legs, and skulls have been broken by the missiles intended for the sufferer in the strings? It is dangerous in

some places to pass the streets on Shrove Tuesday. The barbarity to the harmless creature at the stake, one would think, should be an object of horror both to the actors and spectators in this inhuman tragedy; but the greatest unhappiness attending the rude exercises of cock-throwing, bull-baiting, prize-fighting, and the like bear-garden diversions, is that they inspire the mind of children with a savage disposition, highly pleased with acts of cruelty.

Twenty-four years before Steele had observed, in the columns of the *Guardian*, that enjoyment of the sufferings of animals had become almost a distinguishing characteristic of our nation; and this was matter of comment by foreigners. The tone of the age may be, perhaps, summarised in the following anecdote. The planters of Virginia had petitioned that some provision for the cure of souls in the colony should be made. "Damn your souls!" wrote back the attorney-general: "grow tobacco." It is unnecessary to pile up further testimony as to the spiritual and moral condition

of the England of the reigns of Queen Anne and the first two Georges.

Into such a world as this John Wesley was born on June 17, 1703, at Epworth, of which Lincolnshire market town his father, the Rev. Samuel Wesley, was rector. The living of Epworth was the elder Mr. Wesley's reward for a work in defence of the Revolution, dedicated to Queen Mary. His wife Susannah, John's mother, was daughter of Dr. Annesley, one of the "ejected ministers." She was a woman of strong intelligence, a devout Christian, and as a mother admirable. A curious incident in the relations of the rector of Epworth with his wife illustrates the resolute temper of both, while it helps to fix in the memory the date of John Wesley's birth. It cannot be told better than it is by Southey : —

His wife [says Southey] differed from him in opinion concerning the Revolution, but, as she understood the duty and the wisdom of

obedience, she did not express her dissent; and he discovered it a year only before King William died by observing that she did not say Amen to the prayers for him. Instead of imitating her forbearance, he questioned her upon the subject; and, when she told him she did not believe the Prince of Orange was king, he vowed never again to cohabit with her till she did. In pursuance of this unwarrantable vow, he immediately took horse and rode away; nor did she hear of him again till the death of the king, about twelve months afterward, released him from his rash and criminal engagement. John was their first child after his separation.

Although Wesley's mother was, like his father, intensely attached to the English Establishment, her father, Dr. Annesley, was, as we have seen, an "ejected minister," one of those who seceded in consequence of the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Similarly, Wesley's great-grandfather, Bartholomew Wesley, and his grandfather, John Wesley, were "ejected ministers"; while Samuel Wesley, his father, like Susannah Wesley, his mother, left the

Dissenters. It will be seen, therefore, that Wesley was descended on both sides from people who felt profound interest in matters religious. Susannah, in a letter to her son Samuel, John's brother, informed him that she was engaged in drawing up an account of her leaving the Dissenters at the age of thirteen, giving "the main of the controversy between them and the Church, as far as it had then come to her knowledge." Husband and wife were perhaps too much alike to be perfectly happy together. That things did not go always smoothly may be gathered from the episode of the omitted "Amen"; and we have the evidence of the eldest son Samuel, also, who observes in a letter to John in 1727, "Would to God my father and mother were as easy in one another as my wife and I are!"

The Wesley children were brought up with great care and strictness, and the training began early. "When turned a

year old," writes their mother, "they were taught to fear the rod and to cry softly." Thus "that most odious noise, the crying of children, was rarely heard in the house." None of the children were permitted to call each other by their proper names without the addition of "brother" or "sister." Still, Mrs. Wesley was not a mere disciplinarian. She says very sensibly, "When the will of a child is subdued, many childish follies and inadvertencies may be passed by." Whatever may have been the merits and defects of Susannah Wesley, she earned unquestionably the admiring respect of her children. John Wesley declared in later years that he was hampered in making up his mind to marriage by the reflection that he never could expect to see any woman who equalled his mother. She had great faith in the value of definite religious instruction, and gave up one evening a week to religious conversation with each

child. "On Thursday I talk with Jacky," she says in a letter to her husband, "and on Saturday with Charles."

There are two incidents in Wesley's youth which figure in every account of his life, and, moreover, made a deep impression on him. These were the Epworth fire and the Epworth ghost. The fenmen in the neighbourhood of the Lincolnshire town partook of the general barbarity of the time, and a clean-living family in their midst was naturally an object of aversion. Hence arose incendiary attacks on the rectory. The house was burnt down; and John Wesley, then a child of six, was nearly burnt with it. He was with difficulty rescued through the nursery window just as the roof fell in. In after years and referring to this circumstance, a house in flames figures below his portrait in an engraving, with the motto, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?" Charles, his brother and colleague in his later



work, to whom John seems to have been more attached than to any other mortal, was two months old at this time. Mrs. Wesley was much impressed by the circumstance, and in a private meditation found among her papers she expresses in prayer her intention to be more *particularly* careful of the soul of this child which God had so mercifully provided for. "Lord, give me grace to do it sincerely and prudently," she says, "and bless my attempts with good success."

As to the Epworth ghost, people will form different opinions, in accordance with their prepossessions. The manifestations began in November, 1715, when John was away at school at the Charterhouse; and they lasted for some considerable time. First, the maid-servant was terrified by dismal groans at the dining-room door. The family laughed at this, but were soon themselves disturbed by strange knockings in different parts of the house. Then there

were loud rumblings up stairs and down, a crashing of glass as if a number of bottles had been smashed to pieces, a sound of dancing from an empty room, gobbling like a turkey cock. Generally, there were knockings about the beds and all over the house at night. Mrs. Wesley tried to account for the disturbances on two theories,—one of rats, the other of mischievous outside influence. A horn was borrowed to scare the supposed rats, but in vain ; and the house-dog, a mastiff, was cowed and terrified by the noises. Mr. Wesley, who was from home when these circumstances occurred, was awakened on the night following his return by nine loud and distinct knocks. Whatever it was, one of Mr. Wesley's children, Emilia, gave it a name,—Jeffery. Mr. Wesley, who was perplexed in his turn, rebuked Jeffery one day sharply, called him a deaf and dumb devil, and bade him cease to disturb innocent children. If

Jeffery had anything to say, let him come to his study. Jeffery took him at his word ; and, as a consequence, John Wesley's father was pushed by it thrice with considerable force. There is much of the same sort ; and there is in existence a great amount of documentary evidence,—letters from members of the family, all frank and common-sense in tone,—evidence collected in after years by John Wesley himself. Dr. Priestley, a distinguished contemporary, described it as “perhaps the best-authenticated and best-told story of the kind that is anywhere extant” ; and he noted favourably the fact “that all the parties seem to have been sufficiently void of fear and also free from credulity, except the general belief that such things were supernatural.”

The rector of Epworth's three sons, Samuel, John, and Charles, were all able men. Samuel, the eldest, obtained distinction as a classical scholar both at

Westminster and Christchurch. He seems to have been held in high esteem by Atterbury, was usher at his old school, and subsequently master of Tiverton grammar school. Charles, his youngest brother, was under him at Westminster, and similarly was elected to Christchurch. John received his schooling at Charterhouse, and, like his two brothers, became a Christchurch man. In all, Samuel and Susannah Wesley had nineteen children. At school John Wesley was regular, quiet, and industrious. He suffered so far from the bullying of the senior boys, who seem to have greedily and brutally robbed their juniors of their fare, that his only food for the most part of his school days was a small portion of bread daily. However, this frugal diet did not disagree with him, if one may form an opinion from his longevity and invariable good health, though he himself was wont to attribute his wonderful constitution to

the fact that he had always strictly observed an injunction of his father,—to run round Charterhouse garden three times every morning.

## II.

WHEN John Wesley was seventeen years old, he went up from Charterhouse to Christchurch, Oxford, so that his undergraduate career commenced in 1720, and our first Hanoverian king had then been some six years on the throne. There is an absolute consensus of testimony as to the deplorable condition, from a spiritual, moral, or educational standpoint, of the Oxford of the first two Georges. Gibbon has left on record that he regarded his residence here as "the most idle and unprofitable period of his life." Adam Smith, who lived at Oxford from 1740 to 1747, observes :—

In the University of Oxford the greater part of the professors have for these many years given up even the pretence of teaching. The discipline is, in general, contrived, not for the benefit of the students, but for the ease of the masters. As for the undergraduates, they wasted their time in drinking and gambling.

Says another writer on this subject : —

While the public professors received £100 or £200 a year for giving no lectures, the candidates for degrees were obliged to ask and pay for a dispensation for not having attended the lectures that never were given. . . . Whatever the Oxford undergraduate omitted to learn, he would not fail to acquire a ready facility in subscribing, with solemn attestations, professions which he violated without hesitation or regret.

With reference to the religious atmosphere of the place, Gibbon may again be quoted. "Our venerable mother," says the author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, "had contrived to unite the opposite extremes of bigotry and indifference."

Into this curious academic milieu came Wesley, still a lad in his teens, much better equipped than most of his contemporary Freshmen. Although he pursued his studies with diligence, he was none the less easy and pleasant in his manners, witty and vivacious ; and, if he attracted special notice, it was for his

intellectual attainments, and more particularly for his smartness as a logician. As soon, however, as the time drew near for him to receive deacon's orders in the English Church, he gave himself energetically to the study of theology. Two books at this period exercised a great influence upon him, the *De Imitatione Christi* of Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor's *Rules of Holy Living and Dying*. This reading tended to make him more devout. He became a weekly communicant, and began to pray for that inward holiness on which Jeremy Taylor had laid stress. On September 19, 1725, he was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Potter, a prelate who was subsequently raised to the see of Canterbury. Although there was nothing in his conduct which would nowadays arouse much hostility in the university, yet his strictness of life was already exciting opposition, which took the form of satire and ridicule. This did not



hinder his election, however, as Fellow of Lincoln in March of the following year, 1726,—an event which delighted his good old father, the rector of Epworth, who in his letter of congratulation to his son says :—

What will be my own fate before the summer be over, God knows; *sed passi graviora*. Wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln.

Further honours awaited Wesley. At the end of 1726 he became Greek lecturer and moderator of the classes.

With his election to a Fellowship came greater opportunity of choosing his own society :—

I narrowly observed the temper and behaviour [he says] of all that visited me. I saw no reason to think that the greater part of these truly loved or feared God. Such acquaintance, therefore, I did not choose. I could not expect they would do me any good. Therefore, when any of these came, I behaved as courteously as I could; but to the question, When will you come to see me? I returned no answer. When they had come a few times and found I

still declined returning the visit, I saw them no more.

And this was his invariable rule for the rest of his life.

In August, 1727, as his father's health was failing, he went into Lincolnshire to act as his curate; and he remained there, residing at Wroote, hard by Epworth, till November, 1729. While he was curate here, he was ordained priest by Bishop Potter, of Oxford, on September 22, 1729. These dates are important, because it was after his return to Lincoln College, where he had been summoned in accordance with a college regulation which affected junior Fellows, that he became associated with the little band of university men to whom the name of Methodist was derisively applied.

Just after John Wesley became Fellow of Lincoln, his brother Charles came up from Westminster to Christchurch, having been elected to a studentship.

Before John left for the curacy at Epworth, the two brothers were not on such cordially intimate terms as they were later, Charles meeting his brother's religious approaches with the declaration that he would not "become a saint all at once." But in the period 1727-29 a change came over him, which he attributed to his mother's prayers. He became acquainted with undergraduates of like tendencies; and, in order to their religious improvement, they met frequently, lived by rule, and communicated weekly. Nowadays such conduct would arouse no particular comment; but in the Oxford of George II. it was otherwise. Charles Wesley and his friends were derided and nicknamed the Holy or the Godly Club, Bible-bigots, Bible-moths, and Sacramentarians; and one wit observed that a new sect of Methodists had sprung up. And, of all the names, this is the one that stuck. It had a certain appropriateness as ap-

plied to young men who in a dissolute and happy-go-lucky community regularised their lives on some sort of method. At any rate, when John Wesley returned from Epworth in 1729 to his duties at Lincoln, he found his brother and his little band of friends an established and much-abused feature of the life of Oxford. He immediately became their recognised leader, his standing in the university concentrating attention on him, and was known as the Father of the Holy Club. The more noticeable members of it were James Hervey, author of the *Meditations*,—which then attained an European popularity, though now held in small esteem,—and some years later, George Whitefield. The latter was the son of a Gloucester innkeeper. He was born in 1714, and, when he was eighteen, came up to Oxford as a servitor at Pembroke College. He had been profoundly moved by religious influences before coming up to

Oxford, notably by his reading the famous work of Thomas à Kempis. He was much drawn towards the Methodists, and was eventually taken under the wing of the Wesleys.

They were now [says a well-known writer] about fifteen in number: when they first began to meet, they read divinity on Sunday evenings only, and pursued their classical studies on other nights, but religion soon became the sole business of their meetings: they now regularly visited the prisoners and the sick, communicated once a week, and fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, the stationary days of the Ancient Church, which were thus set apart because on those days our Saviour had been betrayed and crucified. They also drew up a scheme of examination, to assist themselves, by means of prayer and meditation, in attaining simplicity and the love of God. Except that it speaks of obeying the laws of the Church of England, it might fitly be appended to the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola.

Wesley even obtained the sanction of the Bishop of Oxford to their visiting the prisons.

It was at this time Wesley came under

the influence of William Law, the author of *Christian Perfection* and the *Serious Call*. These works had in their day a profound effect on the minds of religiously disposed Protestants. For example, we have the testimony of no less a person than Dr. Johnson, who said :—

When at Oxford, I took up Law's *Serious Call to a Holy Life*, expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me, and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry.

The Wesleys walked from Oxford to Putney on foot, from time to time, in order to see Law, who was then tutor to Mr. Gibbon, the father of the historian. Subsequently Wesley censured Law for the omissions in his counsel to the brothers at this time, so that a characteristic excerpt from his advice to them will be interesting. It is noteworthy that John Wesley rounded upon his

advisers at different stages, denouncing as in nether darkness those whom a while before he had accepted as prophets. First it was Law, then it was Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Law said to Wesley :—

You are to follow the Divine Light; wherever it leads you, in all your conduct. It is God alone that gives the blessing. I pray you always mind your own work, and go on with cheerfulness; and God, you may depend upon it, will take care of His. Besides, Sir, I perceive you would fain convert the world! but you must wait God's own time. Nay, if after all He is pleased to use you only as a hewer of wood or a drawer of water, you should submit,—yea, you should be thankful to Him that He has honoured you so far.

Wesley's very visits to Law show him in a restless state of mind. He ever had doubts of the lawfulness of secular studies. "Shall I quite break off my pursuit of all learning," he writes to his mother, "but what immediately tends to practice?" At this time, too, the authorities at Christchurch grew

alarmed, and the rumour flew through the university that "the Dean and Censors were going to blow up the Godly Club." But circumstances of another sort were soon to produce the dispersal of the little band. Wesley and his brothers went down to Epworth for a final family gathering, as the rector's health was plainly breaking up. No doubt there the proposal that he should apply for his father's post, and so secure a home for his mother and sisters, was mooted. Still, all the efforts of his father and family were of no avail to induce him to try to obtain the succession to the Epworth rectory. His brother Samuel wrote to him afterwards strongly in this sense from Tiverton, but Wesley was obdurate; and, from what we know of his failure in Georgia, it may well be questioned whether one of his logical, uncompromising habit of mind would have laboured with happy result in the Lincolnshire parish.



### III.

THE Rev. Samuel Wesley, rector of Epworth, died on April 25, 1735; and on the 14th of October, in the same year, the two brothers, John and Charles Wesley, left Gravesend for America, in company with Mr. Oglethorpe, the founder of the colony of Georgia. Charles, although he had been ordained this year, went out in his official capacity of secretary to the governor and founder. They had as companions Mr. Delamotte, the son of a London merchant, and Mr. Ingham, one of their Oxford intimates.

If Wesley was a failure in Georgia, and was practically driven out by the hostility he aroused among the colonists, his stay was an important turning-point in his life. He went out a High Churchman, and returned to begin a course of activity which led to the founding of the Methodist connection.

On the voyage he came first in contact with the Moravians. He and his friends fasted very strictly, Delamotte and himself, indeed, trying to support life on bread alone. They spent their time without much intermission in prayer and study. In the midst of a severe storm, Wesley was conscious of feeling fear at what seemed the approach of imminent death, while he was at the same time struck with the undisturbed calm of the Moravians. As soon as they arrived on the coast of Georgia, a Moravian pastor, Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, came on board, and put to Wesley some personal questions as to his religious condition. Wesley was very much shaken by them; and, on his brother Charles leaving with Ingham for Frederica, he and Delamotte went to lodge with the Germans at Savannah. To the Moravians' influence Wesley's "conversion" is usually attributed by the official Methodists; and at this time

everything these Germans said or did seems to have borne the *couleur de rose*, much at variance with the sombre hues with which at a later time Wesley clothed them.

It would, within the limits of my space, be impossible to go into the details of Wesley's two and a half years' stay in Georgia; but the two brothers succeeded in getting into hot water both with the governor and with the colonists. His rubrical strictness gave great offence. "He drenched them," says Southey, "with the physic of an intolerant discipline"; and, as they were a somewhat scratch collection of human beings, they did not understand nor like it. One of them said plainly to him that all the quarrels in the colony were caused by his intermeddling conduct.

Besides [he went on], the people say they are Protestants; but, as for you, they cannot tell what religion you are of. They never heard of such a religion before, and they do not know what to make of it.

Whether with the lapse of time things would have calmed down, it is impossible to say ; but Wesley fell in love, and hence, in the end, arose most curious complications. The lady in the case was Sophia Christiana Hopkey, niece of the chief magistrate of Savannah. She came to Wesley to be instructed in religion. She dressed with simplicity, in white, in order to please him ; and, when he was taken ill with fever, she nursed him day and night. His friend Delamotte entertained suspicion of the lady's motives. This he communicated to Wesley, who laid the case before the Moravian bishop ; and the matter was propounded to the Moravian elders. Wesley agreed to abide by their decision. Then the bishop said, "We advise you to proceed no further in this business," to which Wesley rejoined, "The will of the Lord be done."

Miss Hopkey soon after married a Mr. Williamson. When Wesley had occasion

to reprove her for conduct which he judged to be reprehensible, possibly in view of their former relations, she did not take his reproof with absolute equanimity. In the end he expelled her from communion. Her friends were up in arms at once ; and the very next day a warrant was issued against him for defaming Sophia Williamson and refusing to administer to her the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a public congregation, without cause, for which injury the husband laid his damages at one thousand pounds. The situation became exceedingly strained. Mr. Causton read to all who desired to hear their contents the love letters of Wesley to his niece. Wesley himself drew up a statement of the case, with which he edified his congregation after evening prayers. The business of proceeding against Wesley dragged so much that he gave up his intention of waiting to face the matter out, and took ship for England, where

he arrived on February 1, 1738, having been absent two years and four months. Charles Wesley had come home more than a year before with despatches from the governor.

Wesley, at the close of his Georgia experience, entered into a review of his religious progress. He admitted that for years he had "been tossed about by various winds of doctrine." Dissatisfied with the Lutheran and Calvinistic writers of the Reformation period, "who," he says, "magnified faith to such an amazing size that it hid all the rest of the Commandments," he turned to such English ones as Bishop Beveridge, Bishop Taylor, and Mr. Nelson, who appear to have given him some relief. "Only," he writes, "when they interpreted Scripture in different ways, I was often much at a loss." Then he says : —

It was not long before Providence brought me to those who showed me a sure rule of interpreting Scripture, *consensus veterum*: *quod ab*

*omnibus, quod ubique, quod semper creditum.*

At the same time they sufficiently insisted upon a due regard to the one church at all times and in all places.

After this he fell much under the dominion of those whom he calls "the mystic writers," but he found them unsatisfying.

Nor can I at this hour [he continues] give a distinct account how or when I came a little back toward the right way. Only my present sense is this: all the other enemies of Christianity are triflers. The mystics are the most dangerous. They stab it in the vitals, and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them.

Here Wesley would seem to point at his old teacher, Law. Travelling here and there in search of settlement of mind, he now became temporarily docile to Moravian influence.

#### IV.

By a strange coincidence, at the moment John Wesley arrived at Deal, the craft which was bearing Whitefield to Georgia was sheltering in the Downs. When Wesley was aware of this fact, he had recourse to sortilege,—a practice for which he had a great predilection; and Whitefield was astonished by a boat's coming on board with a letter, which ran as follows: "When I saw God by the wind which was carrying you out brought me in, I asked counsel of God. His answer you have enclosed." Whitefield examined the slip of paper conveyed to him in this peremptory and business-like fashion, and read this sentence: "Let him return to London." But, having considered the matter, he determined to proceed to Georgia. He remained there, however, only three months, and during that time got on so well with the colonists



that they regretted the shortness of his stay with them. This is one proof, if there were no other, that Whitefield naturally was a man of much greater personal fascination and general amiability than Wesley. It is well also to bear in mind that in this important year, 1738, which saw Wesley's return from Georgia and Whitefield's going out to and coming back from the same colony, the former was only thirty-five years old and the latter twenty-four. Yet Whitefield had already made a great reputation as a preacher. He had not been idle during Wesley's absence in America.

Whitefield had been profoundly impressed by reading a book entitled *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. When, he says, he found it asserted there that true religion is a union of the soul with God or Christ formed within us, "a ray of divine light darted in upon him, and from that moment he knew he must

be a new creature.” Previously he had passed through a period of much spiritual trial. He describes his suffering during this period as follows :—

When I knelt down, I felt great pressures both on soul and body, and have often prayed under the weight of them till the sweat came through me. God only knows how many nights I have lain upon my bed groaning under what I felt. Whole days and weeks have I spent in lying prostrate on the ground in silent or vocal prayer.

The effect of the change which occurred in him he thus describes :—

But, oh, with what joy—joy unspeakable, even joy that was full of and big with glory—was my soul filled when the weight of sin went off and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God and a full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul! Surely, it was the day of my espousals,—a day to be had in everlasting remembrance. At first my joys were like a spring tide, and, as it were, overflowed the banks. Go where I would, I could not avoid singing of psalms almost aloud. Afterwards they became more settled, and, blessed be God, saving a few casual intervals, have abode and increased in my soul ever since.

This occurred while the Wesleys were undergoing their Georgia troubles.

Dr. Benson, Bishop of Gloucester, was impressed so favourably by what he saw of Whitefield that he sent for him, and, when he found that Whitefield was between twenty-one and twenty-two years of age, told him that, although he had resolved not to ordain any one under three-and-twenty, he should think it his duty to ordain him whenever he came for holy orders. And so he was ordained by the Anglican bishop. "I can call heaven and earth to witness," he said at a later time, "that, when the bishop laid his hand upon me I gave myself up to be a martyr for Him who hung upon the Cross for me." Whitefield's first sermon was preached at Gloucester, in the Church of St. Mary de Crypt. There was a large congregation; and, though some laughed at his youthful appearance, he seems to have at once made his mark. Complaint was

made to the bishop that fifteen people had been driven mad by his preaching, but Dr. Benson merely replied that he hoped the madness might not be forgotten by next Sunday.

Coming up to London, Whitefield read prayers and preached for some two months at Wapping Chapel and at St. Peter ad Vincula in the Tower; and, as Southey puts it, proof enough was given that an "earnest minister will make an attentive congregation." It was while he was in London that he was accepted and presented to the Bishop of London and the primate for the Georgian mission. That his reputation was already becoming wide-spread is clear from the fact that, having occasion to take Bristol on his way to his port of embarkation, — he had gone down to Gloucestershire to bid his family and friends good-bye, — multitudes of the people came out from Bristol in coaches and on foot to meet him, and where he preached the churches

were thronged to suffocation. He had to fly Bristol in the middle of the night to escape the attentions of the throngs of his admirers. In London, where before proceeding to his ship he preached at Cripplegate, St. Anne's, and Foster Lane, there were the same enthusiasm and curiosity to hear him. Even now a report spread that, owing to the jealousy of the clergy, the bishop meant to silence him. This probably had its origin in the fact that he fraternised a good deal with the more earnest Dissenters, and by so doing had given offence. Altogether, perhaps the ecclesiastical authorities were not sorry when he left for Georgia.

As we have seen, as Whitefield left this country, Wesley came back. Within two days of his arrival he was brought into close contact with the Moravians; and one of them, Peter Bohler, became, all at once, apparently, his guide in religious matters. Under this new teacher Wesley arrived at a new conclusion.

“In the hands of God,” he says, “I was clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.” He was so convinced of the absolute doctrinal correctitude of the position to which Peter Boehler had been leading him that he turned round upon his old prophet, William Law, of *Christian Perfection* and the *Serious Call*, and wrote him a somewhat sharp letter, of which the following is a brief excerpt :—

Why did I scarcely ever hear you name the name of Christ; never so as to ground anything upon faith in His blood. . . . I know that I had not faith unless the faith of a devil, the faith of Judas, that speculative notional airy shadow, which lives in the head, not in the heart. But what is this to the living, justifying faith, the faith that cleanses from sin? I beseech you, Sir, by the mercies of God to consider deeply and impartially whether the true reason of your never pressing this upon me was not this, that you had it not yourself?

Law was naturally not a little indignant, and in the course of his reply said :—

You have had a great many conversations with me, and I daresay that you never was with me for half an hour without my being large upon that very doctrine which you make me totally silent and ignorant of.

Wesley fixes the date of his conversion as the 24th of May, 1738. As this is a question about which some difference of opinion may exist, it will be better for me to let him speak for himself. He was at an evening meeting of a religious society in Aldersgate Street. One of the gathering was expounding at the time. Says Wesley :—

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed: I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had, in a more especial manner, despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all these what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?

His brother Samuel was somewhat perplexed by Wesley's new attitude. "What Jack means," he wrote in June, "by his not being a Christian till last month, I understand not"; while Mrs. Samuel rallied her brother-in-law amusingly on the topic. His friend Mr. Hutton, to whom and to whose family he announced on May 29 that he had not been a Christian till the last five days, asked him, "If faith only was necessary to save us, why did our Saviour give us His divine sermon on the mount?" But Wesley answered, "That was the *letter that killeth*." Mr. Hutton replied with a not unnatural indignation,— "Hold, you seem not to know what you say : are our Lord's words the letter that killeth?" After this 24th of May, a date which exerted so important an influence on the Methodist system of doctrine, John Wesley was still not at ease with himself, and left England for Herrnhut in Saxony, the principal centre of Moravianism. In the hope that



conversing with those holy men [he says] who were themselves living witnesses of the full power of faith, and yet able to bear with those that are weak, would be a means of establishing my soul, that I might go on from faith to faith and from strength to strength.

Generally, the result of his visit to Herrnhut was that he came back more hopeful about his own condition. The Moravians were not so sure about it ; and his friend Delamotte, who had joined them, said to him : —

You are better than you was at Savannah. You know that you was then wrong ; but you are not right yet. You know that you was then blind ; but you do not see now.

But Wesley was about to start on his more active career as a preacher and expounder of his doctrine, and with results so striking that he came to the conclusion that he must at length have attained to a satisfactory theological goal. Despite the stress laid by Wesley on the doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit and on Assurance, he was certainly not clear in his

mind as regards himself after the 24th of May, of what he so assiduously preached. As to the Moravians under whose guidance he had arrived so far, whom he praised warmly to his brother Samuel, he wrote of them a little later as follows :

Their practice is agreeable to their principles. Lazy and proud themselves, bitter and censorious toward others, they trample upon the ordinances and despise the commands of Christ. I see no middle point wherein we can meet.

At first the Moravians and the first followers of Wesley were in this country closely associated ; but their views were at root too diametrically opposed for them to get on long together, and therefore at an early stage they broke off all intimacy of relation. The Wesleys were not more fortunate in their intercourse with the French prophets, a sect which had been expelled from the Cevennes by the French government. Charles Wesley was introduced to one of them at

Wickham, where they slept in the same room. This man insisted that the French prophets were equal, if not superior, to the prophets of the Old Testament. When they were undressing, the Frenchman fell into violent agitations and gobbled like a turkey-cock. Charles Wesley says : —

I was frightened, and began exorcising him with,— “Thou deaf and dumb devil!” He soon recovered from his fit of inspiration. I prayed, and went to bed, not half-liking my bedfellow; nor did I sleep very sound with Satan so near me.

Charles had great trouble with the French prophets in London, and his brother John had to warn his female disciples especially against them; and at Bristol, where the prophets had come, he advised his followers “to avoid as fire all who do not speak according to the law and the testimony.” We have now arrived at the point where Wesley practically set up as a teacher on his own account, though he still, as ever,

held himself to be a member of the English Establishment, and was ready to insist upon the carrying out of rubrics which had fallen into disuse in the English Church, such, for instance, as the rebaptising of Dissenters. The doctrine which aroused most criticism and hostility was that of the new birth as enunciated by Wesley, with which was bound up that of Justification and of the Witness of the Spirit. Wesley argued that it was a Scriptural, practical, and experimental doctrine. There is no space here for any adequate statement of his doctrinal arguments. Suffice it to say that in England they aroused much controversial and scurrilous hostility.

## V.

THE most important and critical years in the Evangelical revival were the first four or five in the fifth decade of the eighteenth century. In 1740 Wesley separated from the Moravians. In the following year, 1741, occurred the breach between him and Whitefield. Till 1742 Wesley had confined his activities to the pastoral care of his little groups of followers in London, Bristol, and Wales; but in this year began those ceaseless itinerant journeys which included the whole of England, and practically did not cease till his death, while on June 25, 1744, assembled what may be looked upon as to all intents and purposes, if not in name, the first Methodist Conference. Although the body of Oxonians who gathered about the Wesleys before they went to Georgia was so small, their proceedings had made a great noise; and within four years of their return from

Georgia the great sensation which their preaching and that of Whitefield produced was in full swing. The impression made by their preaching was immediate and wide-spread ; and all those circumstances occurred for which they were most hotly attacked,—the preaching in the fields and those mysterious phenomena which one writer characterises as “the extravagances of the Methodists.” The hostility of mobs and of the clergy of the Protestant Establishment was slower in declaring itself. The events of the subsequent years were less striking, because the great figures of the Revival had become familiarised to the public mind, and their prominence as important factors in the national life was fully recognised. Moreover, the division on the subject of predestination began in 1741 ; and the subsequent controversies between Lady Huntingdon’s connection or the Calvinistic Methodists, who were the predecessors

of the Evangelical party in the Church of England, indeed the whole of the controversies between these people and the Wesleyans, were in logical historical development from the great doctrinal quarrel of the year just mentioned.

In 1739 and 1740 Wesley and Whitefield worked more or less in harmony, and early in the former year began that field preaching which so shocked the nerves of most of their brother clergymen. There can be no question that the two great preachers were driven out of doors by force of two circumstances. First, no ordinary church would hold the multitudes who came to hear them; and, secondly, as the pulpits of the Establishment were speedily closed to them, they had either to abandon preaching or do it in the open air. Whitefield himself says that the idea first came to him one Sunday when he was preaching to a crowded congregation in Bermondsey church, "with great

freedom in his heart, and clearness in his voice.”

Near a thousand people [he observes] stood in the churchyard during the service. Hundreds went away, who could not find room. This put me first upon thinking of preaching without doors.

The event — for at that period it was an event — occurred at Kingswood, near Bristol, on February 17, 1739. This was on old Royal Chace, but the discovery of coal and the consequent opening of collieries had brought there a populace singularly wild and lawless. Very few of them came at first to hear Whitefield ; but, as he put it himself, “the ice is now broke.” These things came to the ears of the chancellor of the diocese of Bristol ; and, sending for the preacher, he told him that he would put a stop to his proceedings. They parted after a sharp argument with what amounted on both sides to a declaration of war, and all the churches in Bristol were shut against



Whitefield. He therefore went to Kingswood again, and his audiences rose in ascending scale from two thousand to four and five thousand, and then to ten, fourteen, and twenty thousand. Here is a description of the scene in his own words : —

The trees and hedges were full. All was hush when I began: the sun shone bright, and God enabled me to preach for an hour with great power and so loud that all, I was told, could hear me.

The profound silence of the vast audiences was very impressive, and what encouraged the preacher more than anything else as he looked down on his rude auditors was that he saw the white gutters made by the tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks. He was very sensible of the spectacular effect of it all, as is seen in this passage : —

The open firmament above me, the prospect of the adjoining fields, with the sight of thousands and thousands, some in coaches, some on

horseback, and some in the trees, and at times all affected and drenched in tears together, to which sometimes was added the solemnity of the approaching evening, was almost too much for and quite overcame me.

Whitefield wrote begging Wesley to join him at Bristol, which Wesley eventually did, though under the impression that he was going to his death. He and his brother Charles had opened the Bible at hazard for guidance, and again and again the texts on which they opened seemed to threaten instant death. However, he survived the sortilege. This was Wesley's first visit to the great city on the Avon; but his reputation had gone before him, and Whitefield himself received him enthusiastically. "Help him, Lord Jesus," he prayed, "to water what Thy own right hand hath planted for Thy mercy's sake." Whitefield, having secured Wesley's presence, took his leave amid manifestations of ardent affection from his friends. The day before he

left, Wesley heard him preach in the open air, and observed on the circumstance as follows : —

I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way, having been all my life, till very lately, so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in church.

However, two days afterwards he preached himself at four o'clock in the afternoon from a little eminence adjoining Bristol to an audience of three thousand people ; and before he left the city, on the 12th of May, 1739, the first stone of a Methodist meeting-house was laid.

It will be convenient here to deal with those mysterious phenomena which accompanied, especially in the beginning, the preaching of the Wesleys. Nothing of the sort seems to have happened while Whitefield remained in Bristol, but they took place soon after he went. It was on this subject that Wesley was

at variance with the Moravians, for the same manifestations had occurred in the Fetterlane room in London, where the Methodists and Moravians met. "The first time I entered their meeting," says the Moravian, Philip Henry Molther, "I was alarmed and almost terror-stricken at hearing their sighing and groaning, their whining and howling, which strange proceeding they called the demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Wesley was very indignant on his return from Bristol to hear from one whom he had left "strong in faith and zealous in good works" that "Molther had convinced her she never had any faith, and advised her till she received faith to be still, ceasing from outward works." What Wesley and Molther, to say nothing of others, regarded from such different standpoints, had best be given in the words of the actual witnesses. For example, here is one story. As Wesley was returning to Bristol from Kingswood

one evening, he was urgently entreated to go back to a young woman. I give the narrative in his own words :—

The fact I nakedly relate [says Wesley], and leave every man to his own judgment of it. I went. She was nineteen or twenty years old, but could not write or read. I found her on the bed, two or three persons holding her. It was a terrible sight. Anguish, horror, and despair above all description appeared in her pale face. The thousand distortions of her whole body showed how the dogs of hell were gnawing at her heart. The shrieks intermixed were scarce to be endured, but her stony eyes could not weep. She screamed out as words could find their way: "I am damned, damned, lost forever! Six days ago you might have helped me, but it is past—I am the devil's now—I have given myself to him—his I am—him I must serve—with him I must go to hell—I will be his—I will serve him—I will go with him to hell—I cannot be saved—I will not be saved—I must, I will, I will be damned!" She then began praying to the devil: we began, "Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!" She immediately sunk down as asleep; but, as soon as we left off, broke out again with inexpressible vehemence: "Stony hearts, break! I am a warning to you. Break, break, poor stony hearts! Will you not break? What can be done more for stony

hearts? I am damned that you may be saved! Now break, now break, poor stony hearts! You need not be damned, though I must." She then fixed her eyes on the corner of the ceiling and said: "There he is! ay, there he is! Come, good devil, come! Take me away! You said you would dash my brains out: come, do it quickly! I am yours—I will be yours! take me away!" We interrupted her by calling again upon God, on which she sunk down as before, and another young woman began to roar as loud as she had done. My brother now came in, it being about nine o'clock. We continued in prayer till past eleven, when God in a moment spoke peace into the soul, first of the first tormented and then of the other; and they both joined in singing praise to Him who had stilled the enemy and the avenger.

When preaching at Newgate, Wesley says with reference to his hearers, "Immediately one and another and another sank to the earth: they dropped on every side as thunderstruck." His voice could scarcely be heard sometimes amid the groans and cries of the distressed people. A weaver named John Haydon, who had been at Wesley's meetings, was reading a sermon on "Sal-

vation by Faith." As he was at the last page, his colour changed, he fell off his chair, beat himself against the ground, and screamed so terribly that the neighbours were alarmed and ran into the house. Some one went to Wesley, and told him the man was gone raving mad. Wesley says : —

I found him on the floor, the room being full of people, whom his wife would have kept without; but he cried out aloud, "No, let them all come, let all the world see the just judgment of God!" Two or three men were holding him as well as they could. He immediately fixed his eyes upon me, and, stretching out his hand, cried: "Aye, this is he who I said was a deceiver of the people! But God has overtaken me. I said it was all a delusion, but this is no delusion!" He then roared out: "O thou devil, thou cursed devil, yea, thou legion of devils! thou canst not stay! Christ will cast thee out! I know his work is begun! Tear me to pieces if thou wilt; but thou canst not hurt me!" He then beat himself against the ground again, his breast heaving at the same time, as in the pangs of death, and great drops of sweat trickling down his face. We all betook ourselves to prayer. His pangs ceased, and both his body and soul were set at liberty.

A considerable difference of opinion about these events, which were of very frequent occurrence in the early part of Wesley's career as a field preacher, has always existed. Phenomena of the same sort, if not even more striking, attended the preaching of Mr. Berridge, vicar of Everton, some years later ; and they have not been altogether unknown in more modern revivals. There can be no question that occasionally shamming or make-believe or imitativeness operated. And Wesley had to act accordingly ; nor did he shrink from drastic measures when he was reasonably convinced that insincerity was at work. He tells us in his journal : —

To-day one came who was pleased to fall into a fit for my entertainment. He beat himself heartily. I thought it a pity to hinder him, so, instead of singing over him as had often been done, we left him to recover at his leisure. A girl, as she began her cry, I ordered to be carried out. Her convulsions were so violent as to take away the use of her limbs, till they laid her with-



out at the door and left her: then she immediately found her legs and walked off. Some very unstill sisters, who always took care to stand near me and tried who could cry loudest, since I have had them removed out of my sight, have been as quiet as lambs.

It does not seem easy to account for a large part of the phenomena of early Methodism on purely natural grounds. People were ready enough to do so then. Fits, hysterics, lunacy, were words very easily spoken, but scarcely carried absolute conviction to sincere and thoughtful people. Miss Julia Wedgwood, the author of one well-known *Life of Wesley*, puts forth the following theory:—

Any one [she says] who studies the account with the same attention as he would give to that of any other strange event will be convinced that there was something in the personal influence of Wesley (for it certainly does not remain in his sermons) which had the power of impressing on a dull and lethargic world such a sense of the horror of evil, its mysterious closeness to the human soul, and the need of a miracle for the separation of the two, as no one perhaps could suddenly receive without some violent physical effect.

Whatever may have been the cause, there can be no question that these events excited a strong prejudice in the minds of many of Wesley's contemporaries, notably of the Anglican episcopate and clergy, and did not tend to lessen the breach which was opening between him and them. They were very marked during his stay in Bristol, which lasted two months ; and, though they were of frequent recurrence, it will not be necessary to say more about them here.

## VI.

I HAVE already alluded to the breach with the Moravians. This became final in 1740. Wesley accused them of being cruel and deceitful men. And in his journals he published charges made by others, which were of the foulest kind. One passage may be quoted as a specimen of the rest, and of Wesley's change of mood towards his teachers of but a brief while before : —

Mr. Rimins has said nothing [he observes] to what might have been said concerning their marriage ceremony. I know a hundred times more than he has written, but the particulars are too shocking to relate. I believe no such things were ever practised before; no, not among the most barbarous heathens.

Count Zinzendorf and Wesley, it is plain, were quite incompatible with each other.

But, interesting as is this breach, it is of small importance as compared with that which declared itself between Wesley and Whitefield on the subject of pre-

destination. The latter had returned to America, on a second visit ; and Wesley had written to him to obtain his approval of his own doctrines of “perfection,” and of the “free, full, and present salvation from all the guilt, all the power, and all the inbeing of sin” and his denial of the Calvinistic tenet of election and irreversible decrees. Whitefield, who was a man of great personal amiability, then and always sincerely attached to Wesley, was anxious to avoid the controversy.

The doctrine of election [he replied] and the final perseverance of those who are in Christ I am ten thousand times more convinced of, if possible, than when I saw you last. You think otherwise. Why, then, should we dispute, when there is no probability of convincing? Will it not, in the end, destroy brotherly love, and insensibly take from us that cordial union and sweetness of soul which I pray God may always subsist between us?

This, on the whole, is very kindly and sensibly put ; but after an interval of

two months he writes again to Wesley, and in another strain : —

The more [he says] I examine the writings of the most experienced men, and the experiences of the most established Christians, the more I differ from your notion about not committing sin, and your denying the doctrines of election and the final perseverance of the saints. I dread coming to England, unless you are resolved to oppose those truths with less warmth than when I was there last. I dread your coming over to America, because the work of God is carried on here, and that in a most glorious manner, by doctrines quite opposite to those you hold.

There was much more to the same effect ; but Wesley seems to have taken it all very calmly, and thanked Whitefield for his letter. In the course of his reply he made the following striking and suggestive observations : —

The case is quite plain. There are bigots both for predestination and against it. God is sending a message to those on either side, but neither will receive it unless from one who is of their own opinion. Therefore for a time you are suffered to be of one opinion and I of another.

Whitefield would appear to have grown alarmed at the correspondence and its tendency, for about this time he wrote a friend, "For Christ's sake, desire dear brother Wesley to avoid disputing with me"; and he also begged Wesley himself not to allude to the strife in his sermons, that it might not become public property. But Wesley had already had a smart verbal and public encounter on the topic of Calvinism with one of his leading members named Acourt, who left the meeting with the threat: "I will go and tell all the world that you and your brother are false prophets." Whitefield himself now adopted a less pleasing tone.

Give me leave [he wrote to Wesley] with all humility to exhort you not to be strenuous in opposing the doctrines of election and final perseverance when, by your own confession, you have not the witness of the Spirit within yourself, and consequently are not a proper judge. I am assured God has now for some years given me this living witness in my soul. . . . I cannot bear the thoughts of opposing you; but how can I avoid it if you go about, as your brother

Charles once said, to drive John Calvin out of Bristol?

As the controversy went on, Whitefield became more severe and personal; and, thick-skinned in such matters as Wesley was, he could scarcely have liked it:—

My dear brother, take heed! [wrote Whitefield]. See that you are in Christ a new creature! Beware of a false peace: strive to enter in at the strait gate; and give all diligence to make your calling and election sure: remember you are but a babe in Christ, if so much! Be humble, talk little, think and pray much.

The controversy led to a split in the Methodist society in Bristol, where the Calvinists found a leader in a young man named Cennick. To him, however, and his followers Wesley gave short shrift. After a brief and animated argument he expelled them. Indeed, Calvinism made a permanent division in what had seemed externally a more or less united body. For Whitefield Wesley always entertained a cordial affec-

tion. In what was his final utterance at this period he writes to Whitefield :—

But I spare you! mine hand shall not be upon you: the Lord be judge between thee and me. The general tenor of my public and private exhortations, when I touch thereon at all, as even my enemies know, if they would testify, is, Spare the young man, even Absolom, for my sake.

In the course of this correspondence one passage occurs which, in the light of modern developments, is amusing enough. Writing to Whitefield, Wesley says :—

The Society room, at Bristol, you say is adorned. How? Why, with a piece of green cloth nailed to the desk; two sconces for eight candles each in the middle; and—nay, I know no more. Now which of these can be spared I know not; neither would I desire more adorning or less.

The language used towards Wesley, by Whitefield's fellow Calvinistic Methodists, was much more bitter than that of their chief; and nothing can well ex-



ceed the bitterness with which they assailed him towards the end of his life. Among the most notable writers on their side were Augustus Montague Toplady, vicar of Broad Hembury, Devonshire, now best known perhaps as author of the hymn "Rock of Ages"; the brothers Richard (afterwards Sir Richard) and Rowland Hill and the Rev. Mr. Berridge, of Everton. Mr. Toplady had published a *Treatise upon Absolute Predestination, chiefly translated from the Latin of Zanchius*. At the close of an analysis of this treatise, Wesley made the following observations, which gave grave offence to his opponents : —

The sum of all this,—one in twenty, suppose, of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will; the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can. Reader, believe this or be damned. Witness my hand, A—T—

This making light of the initials of his

signature at the end of this caustic parody of his views seems to have annoyed Toplady profoundly. At all events, he could scarcely have been in a happy frame of mind when he wrote as follows :

In almost any other case a similar forgery would commit the criminal to Virginia or Maryland, if not to Tyburn. The Satanic guilt of the person who could excogitate and publish to the world a position like that baffles all power of description, and is only to be exceeded (if exceedable) by the Satanic shamelessness which dares to lay the black position at the door of other men.

Mr. Wesley, having cleared himself from the absurd aspersion that he intended the passage quoted to be taken as an excerpt from Toplady's work, withdrew personally from the controversy, leaving the conduct of it to one of his preachers, Thomas Olivers, an able and a zealous man, who had once been a shoemaker. Toplady was irritated by the implied contempt, and it must be borne in mind that aristocratic Method-

ism was Calvinistic ; and this is true of its outcome, the Evangelical party in the English Establishment.

Let Mr. Wesley fight his own battles [exclaimed the irate Toplady]. I am as ready as ever to meet him with the sling of reason and the stone of God's word in my hand. But let him not fight by proxy, let his cobblers keep to their stalls; let his tinkers mend their brazen vessels; let his barbers confine themselves to their blocks and basons; let his blacksmiths blow more suitable coals than those of nice controversy, every man in his own order.

He even put rhyme of the Hudibrastic metre in Wesley's mouth, of which this quatrain may serve as a specimen : —

Of all my ragged regiment,  
This cobbler gives me most content,—  
My forgeries' and faith's defender,  
My barber, champion, and shoe-mender.

It is only fair to Toplady to mention that, being brought into personal contact with Olivers, he was so far disabused of his prejudice as to write afterwards : —

To say the truth, I am glad I saw Mr. Olivers; for he appears to be a person of stronger sense

and better behaviour than I imagined. Had his understanding been cultivated by a liberal education, I believe he would have made some figure in life.

And, indeed, in one of his letters he wrote of Wesley : —

God is witness how earnestly I wish it may consist with the Divine will to touch the heart and open the eyes of that unhappy man! I hold it as much my duty to pray for his conversion as to expose the futility of his railings against the truths of the gospel.

In his controversy with Wesley's friend Fletcher, vicar of Madeley in Shropshire, Toplady expressed himself with even more bitterness and violence. He said of that divine's works that in the very few pages he had perused, the serious passages were dulness double-condensed and the lighter passages impudence double-distilled. There was the less excuse for this language, as Fletcher himself was a very gentle and inoffensive disputant. Once, when sending a controversial manuscript to a

young friend, the vicar of Madeley had said : —

I beg, as upon my bended knees, you would revise and correct it, and take off *quod durius sonat* in point of words, reproof, style.... Quench some of my brands; blunt some of my arrows; and take off all my deaths except that which I design for Antinomianism.

Toplady would scarcely have had qualms of this sort, and yet his admirers have said of him that he “stands paramount in the plenitude of dignity above most of his contemporaries.” If one possessed of a “plenitude of dignity” could express himself as he did, we may readily imagine the fashion in which the members of his party less abundantly gifted would write and talk. Wesley, in his journals, gives an amusing instance of the horror in which he came to be regarded by these people. It occurred one afternoon when he was riding to Northampton from Newport-Pagnel.

I overtook a serious man [he writes] with whom I immediately fell into conversation. He presently gave me to know what his opinions were: therefore I said nothing to contradict them. But that did not content him: he was quite uneasy to know whether I held the doctrine of the decrees as he did; but I told him, over and over, we had better keep to practical things, lest we should be angry at one another. And so we did for two miles, till he caught me unawares, and dragged me into the dispute before I knew where I was. He then grew warmer and warmer, told me I was rotten at heart, and supposed I was one of John Wesley's followers. I told him, "No, I am John Wesley himself!" upon which,

*"Improvisum aspris veluti qui sentibus anguem  
Pressit,"*

he would gladly have run away outright, but, being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side, and endeavoured to show him his heart till we came into the street of Northampton.

Despite the bitterness of this controversy, Whitefield and Wesley mutually understood each other's good intentions, and recognised high qualities in each other. When Whitefield was dying and

was asked if Wesley should preach his funeral sermon, he answered, "He is the man."

It may be generally observed, however, that Whitefield and his Predestinarian doctrines found much more favour among the aristocracy and the upper classes than did Wesley. The latter preferred, and expressed the preference openly and distinctly for, the middle and lower middle classes ; and he was quite incapable of the exaggerated deference to rank which came naturally enough to the former tapster at the Bull Inn, Gloucester.

A word in the lesson [says Whitefield in the course of a letter to Selina, Countess of Huntingdon] when I was last with your ladyship struck me,—*Paul preached privately to those that were of reputation.* This must be the way, I presume, of dealing with the nobility, who yet know not the Lord.

Again he writes : —

I just now rose from the ground, after praying the Lord of all lords to water your soul, honoured madam, every moment. As there

seems to be a door opening for the nobility to hear the gospel, I will defer my journey, and, God willing, preach at your ladyship's. Oh that God may be with me, and make me humble! I am ashamed to think your ladyship will admit me under your roof. Much more am I amazed that the Lord Jesus will make use of such a creature as I am,—quite astonished at your ladyship's condescension, and the unmerited, superabounding grace of Him who has loved me and given Himself for me.

Wesley could not have written this. It would have choked him. But the tone and strain was acceptable, no doubt, to the countess and her friends; and the flavour of lusciousness in it has been a persistent characteristic of Whitefield's Calvinistic successors in the Establishment. Wesley, on the other hand, writing to an earl who was keenly interested in his work, says:—

To speak rough truth, I do not desire any intercourse with any persons of quality in England. I mean for my own sake. They do me no good, and I fear I can do none to them.

And in another place he says:—



In most genteel religious people there is so strange a mixture that I have seldom much confidence in them. But I love the poor: in many of them I find pure, genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly, and affectation.

## VII.

FROM a populace such as that of England in the middle of the eighteenth century, some turbulent hostility to such preaching as that of Wesley and Whitefield was to be expected. Yet Whitefield, at the beginning, had small cause for complaint. Both at Moorfields and Kennington Common he addressed enormous audiences, composed of all classes. As many as eighty carriages had been counted in one congregation, in addition to a large number of horsemen, and from thirty to forty thousand pedestrians. It was Whitefield who in London, no less than at Bristol, introduced Wesley to field preaching. The latter went down to Blackheath to hear his friend preach. There were twelve to fourteen thousand persons on the ground, when Whitefield asked Wesley to preach in his stead. This he did in compassion, he says, for the rich who were present. Many of

them, however, disappointed in the change of preachers, drove away in their carriages. But at this time, before the Predestinarian quarrel, we hear little of mob violence. As Wesley proceeded with his work of an itinerant field preacher, it began to develop. It must be remembered that this was a time of political uneasiness. We were engaged in foreign war, and the Pretender might be expected any day. The most absurd lies were circulated about Wesley, with the intention, possibly, of stirring up the people against him; possibly, also, because men were ready to believe anything which seemed to be in prejudice of one whose proceedings they did not like. Some people said he was a Quaker, others an Anabaptist, and one man was bold enough to dub him a "Presbyterian Papist." It was averred that, having hanged himself, he was cut down just in time; that he was in receipt of large sums of money from the Spanish govern-

ment, whose troops, when they landed, he was to join with twenty thousand men. They said he had been fined for selling gin, been in prison for high treason, and been seen with the Pretender in France. Charles Wesley was haled before the Wakefield magistrates because he had been heard to pray that the Lord would "call home his banished ones" ; and, of course, every one thought that he must mean the exiled house of Stuart. The magistrates, when Charles Wesley explained things to them, declared themselves perfectly satisfied with his innocence. The phenomena which have already been described excited antipathy. "Your preaching frightens people out of their wits," said Beau Nash, master of the ceremonies at Bath, who had interrupted one of Wesley's field preachings. "Sir," asked Wesley, "did you ever hear me preach?" "No," said Beau Nash. "How, then, can you judge of what you have never

heard?" To this Nash replied, "By common report." Here the master of the ceremonies rather gave himself away; for Wesley at once said: "Sir, is not your name Nash? I dare not judge of you by common report: I think it not enough to judge by."

In Bristol and London the magistrates interposed on Wesley's behalf with such vigour that the mob, on the whole, was cowed; though, before the civil power came to his aid, they stoned him and his people in the streets and tried to unroof the Foundry, threw wildfire and crackers into the room where he was preaching in Chelsea, and broke in the roof at Long Lane with stones, so as to endanger the lives of the people inside.

In some parts of the country, matters assumed a much more serious aspect, especially where people in good position egged on the mob. This was the case, to take one notable example, at Wednesbury, in Staffordshire. When Wesley

preached there in the open air, everything was quiet, and the colliers listened to him readily enough. A society of three or four hundred people was formed in the place. The Anglican clergyman of the town was in the beginning well pleased, and then took offence; while some of the magistrates not only refused to act for the protection of the Methodists, but joined Mr. Egginton, the clergyman, in exciting the mob against them. Hence came scenes of abominable disorder. The rioters smashed the Methodists' windows, broke open their houses, destroyed or stole their goods, and beat, pelted, and dragged in the kennels men, women, and children. They even outraged pregnant women, while they went near murdering those who would not sign a letter of recantation. This anarchy had lasted some four or five months, when Wesley, on arriving at Birmingham, heard of what was going on in the Staffordshire neighborhood.

With characteristic pluck he went immediately to the post of danger. He preached in Wednesbury in the middle of the day, and no one molested him. At night, however, the mob assailed his lodgings with cries of: "Bring out the minister! We *will* have the minister!" Wesley had the leader of the mob brought in; and this man, who seems to have been awed by the manner of his intended victim, when requested, brought in also two of his companions, who were affected as he had been. They allowed Wesley, in any case, to go out and speak to the people. This he did from a chair. He asked them what they wanted with him. Some answered that they wanted him to go before the justices. "With all my heart," said Wesley, adding a few other words, which so touched them that they cried out, "The gentleman is an honest gentleman, and we will spill our blood in his defence." It was the close of an October afternoon when they

set off with Wesley to the nearest magistrate, Mr. Lane, who lived two miles out of Wednesbury, at Bentley Hall. It became dark and rained heavily. On arrival, when they were asked, what was wrong, their leader answered, "Why, an't please you, they sing psalms all day; nay, and make folks rise at five in the morning. And what would your worship advise us to do?" "To go home and be quiet," was the answer. But they were not satisfied. They proceeded to Justice Persehouse at Walsall. Here a much rougher and more furious rabble captured Wesley from the Wednesbury mob. The noise they made was like the raging of the sea, said Wesley. Some tried to trip him, others tore off part of his clothes, while blows with bludgeons, which might have proved fatal, happily missed their object. He was smitten on the mouth so that the blood gushed out. There were those who cried: "Knock his brains



out! Down with him! Kill him at once!" At last he got a chance to make his voice heard, and asked: "What evil have I done? Which of you all have I wronged in thought or word or deed?" His voice and perfect self-mastery came to his aid, but he was again shouted down. Then he began to pray aloud. A curious thing at once happened. The leader of the mob suddenly turned to him, and said: "Sir, I will spend my life for you! Follow me, and not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head." This unexpectedly was a valuable one, as he had been a prize-fighter. He managed to get Wesley out of the clutches of the rabble and back to Wednesbury. Wesley's preachers in other places were even more cruelly handled, and the women who attended the meetings were villanously misused. At St. Ives, in Cornwall, when the news came in that Admiral Matthews had beaten the Spaniards, the populace

were so delighted that to show their joy they pulled down the preaching-house. On this Wesley commented in sardonic fashion, as follows :—

Such is the Cornish method of thanksgiving! I suppose if Admiral Lestock had fought, too, they would have knocked all the Methodists on the head!

At Falmouth, Wesley had pretty well as narrow an escape as at Wednesbury. His house was assailed by a frantic mob with shrieks of : “Bring out the *Canorum*. Where is the *Canorum*?” This odd nickname was given about this time to the Cornish Methodists. His danger appears to have become extreme, when he again went coolly to meet his assailants with :—

Here I am! Which of you has anything to say to me? To which of you have I done any wrong? To you? or you? or you?

Again the leader of a mob changed sides, and swore that not a man should touch him; and this gave time for the

Falmouth clergyman and some of the more respectable inhabitants to come to his rescue. Charles Wesley had an exceedingly narrow escape at Devizes, and in a moment of grave personal emergency showed as much quiet courage and resource as his brother. This kind of mob violence lasted only so long as the magistrates were quiescent. But at last in different places the brutal assailants of the Methodists were vigorously proceeded against, and the period of danger at the hands of the mob passed away. Wesley's comment on this welcome action of local authorities was perfectly placid.

Such a mercy is it [said he] to execute the penalty of the law on those who will not regard its precepts! So many inconveniences to the innocent does it prevent, and so much sin to the guilty.

The fiercest storm of violent opposition was over in England in the first half of the fifth decade of the century. For the

remaining forty-five years of his life  
Wesley went to and fro in comparative  
peace and quiet.

## VIII.

THE process by which John Wesley, without any direct intention on his part, came to be the founder of a new sect, admits of ready explanation. If it is not more generally understood, it is because our people are careless of the details of religious history. Before the advent of Whitefield and Wesley, for many years societies of people concerned for the state of religion and morality had existed ; and their members were in no way identified with non - conformity. Wesley, when he became one of a little band of persons at Oxford, had no idea of a doctrinal or ecclesiastical revolution, but aimed simply at living a devout life and practical Christianity. What he and his friends did, they thought it was the duty of all members of the Anglican Establishment to do. In the same way, when in various places people were moved by his preaching, it was

not unnatural that Wesley should for the purpose of mutual support unite them in societies ; and, as the Moravians were recognised by some, at least, of the members of the Anglican Episcopate, as they played a considerable part in Wesley's doctrinal developments, it is easily to be understood that they at first fraternised with each other in the great towns, such as London and Bristol. In the beginning, therefore, it is plain that no thought of divergence from the Church of England was entertained, since one of the first effects of Wesley's preaching was that the number of communicants in many churches was inconveniently increased. This was made indeed a subject of complaint, and in one case it was objected that it left the clergyman no time to get his dinner. As we have seen at Wednesbury, when a society of three hundred people influenced by Wesley's preaching formed itself, their relations with the local Anglican clergy-

man were at first quite cordial. As Wesley put it, a few persons in London in the beginning asked for his spiritual assistance and that he would advise and pray with them. In various parts of the kingdom the same thing was done by others, and they increased everywhere.

The desire [he said, when questioned on the subject in his later years] was on their part, not on mine: my desire was to live and die in retirement; but I did not see that I could refuse them my help, and be guiltless before God. Here commenced my power; namely, a power to appoint when, where, and how they should meet, and to remove those whose life showed that they had no desire to flee from the wrath to come. And this power remained the same, whether the people meeting together were twelve, twelve hundred, or twelve thousand.

The formation of these local societies preceded that of the class meeting, which is usually and with reason regarded as so distinctive a feature of Methodism. But this institution was, to all seeming, the outgrowth of circumstance, and cer-

tainly not of any cut-and-dried scheme which had built itself up in Wesley's mind. As we have seen, the foundation of the first Methodist preaching-house was laid at Bristol in May, 1739. Wesley had made himself responsible for the expenses of the building. When it was built, the money available fell short of the liabilities. Wesley consulted with the Bristol society about it. A member proposed that every person in the society should contribute a penny a week. When it was objected that some members were too poor to make even so small a contribution, the gentleman responsible for the first suggestion said :—

Put eleven of the poorest with me, and if they can give anything, well, I will call on them weekly; and, if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call upon eleven of your neighbours weekly, receive what they give, and make up what is wanting.

This proposal being agreed, each division of the society, for the purposes of



this financial collection, became known as a class, and the collector as the leader of it. Wesley saw immediately to what use the arrangement might be turned. He therefore advised the leaders not only to collect the money, but to inquire carefully into the behaviour of each contributor. From this it was not a long step to the class meeting weekly, under the leader, to relate experiences, and be consoled, rebuked, or exhorted by him. Seeing this system work so well in Bristol, Wesley introduced it everywhere, and gradually it assumed a more or less stereotyped form, which has existed to the present day. It may be roughly described thus: the leader has a class paper, upon which he marks, opposite to the name of each member, upon every day of meeting, whether the person has attended or not; and, if absent, whether his absence was owing to distance of abode, business, sickness, or neglect. Every member has a printed

class ticket, with a text of Scripture upon it, and a letter. These tickets must be renewed every quarter, the text being changed, and the letter also, till all the alphabet has been gone through ; and then it begins again. One shilling is paid by every member upon receiving a new ticket, and no person without a proper ticket is considered a member of the society. These were later regulations ; but the main system of finance and inspection, for which the class meetings provide, was established at this time, in consequence of the debt incurred for the first meeting-house.

As to the early Methodist preachers, who have been treated of by Southey, under the heading of "Wesley's lay coadjutors," they, like the local societies and the class meeting, were the outcome of events. Wesley did not like the notion of appointing preachers at first. He limited their functions for a time to the expounding of Scripture.

But he found that in his absence his societies were liable to fall away, if there was no one to look after them. Still, Wesley's action in the matter helped forward the separatist tendency of the slowly developing sect. Referring to the English Establishment, he writes :—

It is true, in some things we vary from the rules of our Church, but no further than we apprehend is our bounden duty. It is from a full conviction of this that we preach abroad, use extemporary prayer, form those who appear to be awakened into societies, and permit laymen, whom we believe God has called, to preach. I say *permit*, because we ourselves have hitherto viewed it in no other light.

When the charge of ignorance was made against his preachers, Wesley knew how to express himself trenchantly in their defence :—

In the one thing they profess to know [he wrote] they are not ignorant men. I trust there is not one of them who is not able to go through such an examination in substantial, practical,

experimental divinity as few of our candidates for holy orders, even in the University (I speak it with sorrow and shame, and in tender love), are able to do. But, oh! what manner of examination do most of those candidates go through? and what proof are the testimonials commonly brought (as solemn as the form is wherein they run) either of their piety or knowledge, to whom are entrusted those sheep which God hath purchased with His own blood.

One thing is certain : Wesley succeeded in winning the devoted attachment of his preachers. Some of them were men of attainments : most of them were full of zeal. "I am but a brown-bread preacher," said Thomas Hanson, "that seek to help all I can to heaven, in the best manner I can."

As to the Conference, that certainly owed much more to Wesley's initiative than the societies, the classes, or the setting up of the preachers. Of his own volition he had invited certain clergymen and lay preachers to meet and advise with him, and this gathering became annual.

*They* did not desire the meeting [Wesley says], but *I* did, knowing that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. And when their number increased, so that it was neither needful or convenient to invite them all, for several years I wrote to those with whom I desired to confer, and those only met at the place appointed, till at length, I gave a general permission who desired it might come and observe. I myself sent for those of my own free choice; and I sent for them to advise, not govern me

Another important step taken by Wesley was suggested to him, and not originated by himself. Whenever a chapel was built, the property was vested in Mr. Wesley and the Conference, and not, as was usual with Dissenters, in trustees. Trustee proprietorship was incompatible with itinerant preaching, and with other matters to which Wesley attached importance.

When they have found a preacher they like [he said], the rotation is at an end; at least, till they are tired of him and turn him out. While he stays, the bridle is in his mouth. He would not dare to speak the full and the whole truth, since, if he displeased the trustees, he would be

liable to lose his bread; nor would he dare expel a trustee, though ever so ungodly, from the Society.

It was for the same reason that, in 1784, he instituted what is known as the Legal Hundred of the Conference.

Without some authentic deed [as Wesley said] fixing the meaning of the term, the moment I died the Conference had been nothing: therefore, any of the proprietors of land on which our preaching-houses had been built might have seized them for their own use, and there would have been none to hinder them; for the Conference would have been nobody,—a mere empty name.

Provision was made in 1784, for continuing the succession and identity of the Legal Hundred, in which the administration of the Methodist connection was to be vested after John Wesley's death.

Similarly, circumstances which Wesley could not possibly have foreseen led to his much discussed action with reference to the American Methodists. It

was in 1768 that a regular society was formed in New York, through the efforts of Mr. Embury and Captain Webb; and subsequently Wesley sent over preachers. But the American War of Independence broke out, and interfered with their work. Their difficulties were increased by the strong Royalist pamphlets issued by Wesley. In the end, they were obliged to fly; while the sectarian clergy in the States refused to admit the Methodists to communion or their children to baptism. An appeal was made to Wesley in this emergency; and, for reasons which seemed to satisfy him, he sent for an English clergyman, Dr. Coke, and ordained him "bishop," so that he might proceed to America and superintend the societies in the United States. Hence came into being what is known as the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. As Dr. Coke's letters of ordination have a certain curious interest, leaving

out the preliminary formula and reasons assigned, I quote the concluding words :

Know all men, that I, John Wesley, think myself to be providentially called at this time to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America. And, therefore, under the protection of Almighty God, and with a single eye to His glory, I have this day set apart as a superintendent, by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, a presbyter of the Church of England, and a man whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work; and I do hereby recommend him, to all whom it may concern, as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ. In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four.

In any case, Dr. Coke seems to have been a most estimable person, and, if we may judge from the following anecdote, one who made an excellent impression on others than Methodists. A captain in the navy, from whom he obtained a subscription for Methodist missions to the



negroes, calling upon an acquaintance of Coke's the same morning, said : "Do you know anything of a little fellow who calls himself Dr. Coke, and who is going about begging money for missionaries to be sent among the slaves?" "I know him well," was the reply. "He seems," replied the captain, "to be a heavenly-minded little devil. He coaxed me out of two guineas this morning." Dr. Coke was an active agent in the establishment of Methodist societies in the West Indies, where at the time of Wesley's death, in 1791, there were some six thousand persons, mostly negroes, enrolled in the connection.

It will be evident from what has gone before that Wesley worked with no cut-and-dried scheme for setting up a compact, effective, and permanent religious polity such as the Methodist connection became. His friend Alexander Knox, who speaks with an intimate personal knowledge, expressed his strong personal

conviction that Wesley was totally incapable of *preconceiving* such a scheme.

This [he says] would have implied an exercise of forethought and politic contrivance, than which nothing could be more opposite to his whole mental constitution. Besides, from the specimens which I myself have had of his proceedings, I can even stake my veracity that the account which he gives on different occasions, of his adopting measures simply as they were required by successive emergencies, is unqualified and unimpeachable truth. That he had uncommon acuteness in fitting expedients to conjunctures is most certain: this, in fact, was his great talent.

The Wesleys, both John and Charles, foresaw that after their death the formal separation of the Methodists from the English Establishment would occur, and the idea was utterly repugnant to them. Of that there can be no question. "I am a Church of England man," wrote John Wesley at the age of eighty-five; "and, as I said fifty years ago, so I say still, in the Church I will live and die, unless I am thrust out." Again he

wrote in the same year, "Still, the more I reflect, the more I am convinced that the Methodists ought not to leave the Church." On December 11, 1789, he wrote, "I declare once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England, and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it."

Among the external causes which worked for the separation of the Methodist connection from the English Church, three may be mentioned as important: first, the hostile attitude of the large body of the Anglican clergy towards the movement, and the closing of their pulpits against Mr. Wesley; secondly, the number of Methodists who joined from the Dissenting community; and, thirdly, the natural disinclination of men of the type of the early Methodist preachers to perpetuate the theory of their inferiority to the average Anglican curate.

Upon the whole [said Charles Wesley], I am fully persuaded almost all our preachers are corrupted already. More and more will give the Sacrament, and set up for themselves, before we die; and all except the few that get orders will turn Dissenters before or after our death.

Wesley was swept along by the movement; and it was only the respect and affection of his followers, their tenderness for what they would regard as the prejudices of his education and his early associations, which prevented an open separation during their founder's life.

## IX.

IN Wales, Wesley was disabled from making much impression, owing to his ignorance of the Welsh language ; and this difficulty was not to be overcome. “Oh,” he cried, “what a heavy curse was the confusion of tongues, and how grievous are the effects of it !” This was the more disappointing to him as, on the occasion of his first journey into the principality, he had come to the conclusion that the inhabitants were “ripe for the gospel.” In Scotland his difficulty was of another sort. His sermons left the Scotsmen, as a rule, perfectly unmoved. They heard him decorously, and that was all. Whitefield, on the other hand, was very popular, and expressed his pleasure at his success in characteristic fashion : —

The good that has been done is inexpressible [said he on one occasion]. I am intimate with three noblemen and several ladies of quality, who have a great liking for the things of God. I

am now writing in an earl's house, surrounded with fine furniture; but, glory be to free grace, my soul is in love only with Jesus.

When Whitefield heard that Wesley meant to visit Scotland, he said : —

You have no business there, for your principles are so well known that, if you spoke like an angel, none would hear you; and, if they did, you would have nothing to do but to dispute with one and another from morning to night.

However, Wesley came, and preached first in a kirk at Musselburgh, the audience remaining like statues from the beginning to the end of his sermon. He made the mistake of accepting this quietude as a prognostic of success. But the burgher minister at Dalkeith preached against him, and asserted that, if Wesley died in his present sentiments, he would be damned. Perhaps, if Wesley had been opposed rigorously in Scotland, he might have had more success. The rock he split on was popular indifference. He described his Glasgow experi-

ence as follows: "I preached on the Old Green to a people the greatest part of whom *hear* much, *know* everything, and *feel* nothing." One theory advanced by a Methodist to account for the failure of the Methodist connection to effect any serious lodgment north of the Tweed may be worth mention —

I am fully satisfied [he says] that it requires a far higher degree of the divine influence, generally speaking, to awaken a Scotchman out of the dead sleep of sin than an Englishman.

And yet, when Whitefield made his second visit to Scotland, he was met on the Leith shore by multitudes who wept and blessed him. They followed his coach to Edinburgh and, as he alighted from it, they pressed forward to welcome him, and to hold him in their arms. It is to be borne in mind, however, that Whitefield made no attempt to form a society or societies, as Wesley did. He preached and came away, leaving those who had been influenced by his

preaching to look after themselves. Some Calvinistic Dissenters did, it is true, build a large shed for him near the Foundry and call it a tabernacle, after his separation from Wesley, and he employed lay preachers ; but he had no desire to set up a sect, nor had he the necessary talent. The person who did for the Calvinistic Methodists what Wesley did for his followers was Selina, Countess of Huntingdon ; and so came into existence Lady Huntingdon's connection, Lady Huntingdon's chapels, Lady Huntingdon's preachers, and so on. It was at Lady Huntingdon's house that Whitefield was complimented by Lord Chesterfield, and shook the infidelity of Lord Bolingbroke. Whitefield's fame rests upon his pulpit oratory and his marvellous histrionic gifts. He, therefore, did not arouse the jealousy of other sects, as Wesley did. Moreover, there was that about him personally which had its attraction even for free thinkers,



like Benjamin Franklin and Hume, just as his Calvinistic doctrines commended him to Presbyterians in Scotland and to the English and American descendants of seventeenth-century Puritanism. In Ireland, Wesley founded many societies; but here also Whitefield's attraction as a preacher surpassed his own. He conceived a great liking for the Irish people, and said he had seen as real courtesy in their cabins as at St. James's or the Louvre. Despite his visits to Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, however, he is not a factor in their history or development, as he is in that of England. And even in England his influence was mainly over people drawn from the middle class,—a class whose importance the commercial activities and mechanical discoveries of the present century were to enhance so immensely.

## X.

THOUGH Charles Wesley married happily and had a domestic life which called for no comment or criticism, neither his brother John nor Whitefield was so fortunate. We have seen how, in Georgia, Wesley entered on a disastrous courtship with Sophia Christiana Hopkey; but his first love was by no means his last. The next lady who engaged his affections was a Miss Betty Kirkham. Moreover, a curious correspondence between him and two ladies exists, in which Wesley figures as Cyrus, Mrs. Pendarves as Aspasia, and Miss Betty Kirkham as Varanese. Besides these ladies may be also mentioned Grace Murray and Sarah Ryan as affecting him very favourably. "In the case of any other man," say Abbey and Overton in their *English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, "scandal would often have been busy. But Wesley was above

suspicion. His conduct was put down to the right cause ; viz., a perfect guilelessness and simplicity of nature." At last, he found the woman he thought would suit him in a Mrs. Vazeille, a widow with four children and ten thousand pounds. Wesley had written in favour of celibacy, and felt scruples about marrying. He took counsel, therefore, with his friends, and especially with Mr. Perronet, vicar of Shoreham. The vicar's answer decided him. "Having received a full answer from Mr. Perronet, I was clearly convinced that I ought to marry." And a few days later he acted on his clear conviction, and was married. Every authority concurs in regarding this marriage as a mistake. "It was one of the greatest blunders he ever made," says Tyerman. His wife tried him by jealousy and in many ways. Charles Wesley's daughter wrote that her father used to say that his "brother's patience towards his wife exceeded

all bounds." Still, Wesley's epistolary manner to her was scarcely likely to prove balm to an irritable or passionate nature, as the following extract from a letter to his wife will show:—

God has used many means to curb your stubborn will and break the impetuosity of your temper. He has given you a dutiful but sickly daughter. He has taken away one of your sons: another has been a grievous cross, as the third probably will be. He has suffered you to be defrauded of much money. He has chastened you with strong pain; and still He may say, "How long liftest thou up thyself against Me?" Are you more humble, more gentle, more patient, more placable, than you was? I fear quite the reverse. I fear your natural tempers are rather increased than diminished. Under all these conflicts it might be an unspeakable blessing that you have a husband who knows your temper and can bear with it; who is still willing to forgive you all, to overlook what is past as if it had not been, and to receive you with open arms: only not while you have a sword in your hand with which you are continually striking at me, though you cannot hurt me. If, notwithstanding, you continue striking, what can I, what can all reasonable men think, but that either you are utterly out of your senses or

your eye is not single; that you married me only for my money; that, being disappointed, you was almost always out of humour; that this laid you open to a thousand suspicions, which, once awakened, could sleep no more? My dear Molly, let the time past suffice. If you have not (to prevent my giving it to bad women) robbed me of my substance, too; if you do not blacken me on purpose that when this causes a breach between us no one may believe it to be your fault: stop and consider what you do. As yet the breach may be repaired. You have wronged me much, but not beyond forgiveness. I love you still, and am as clear from all other women as the day I was born.

If Wesley had been an ordinary man, one would say that he was capable on an emergency of giving an epistolary Roland for an Oliver. It is biographically correct, however, where he is concerned, to assume that he was so great and good that in this letter to his wife he only wrote as he would have been written to. They were married in February, 1751; and after twenty years of disquiet she suddenly separated from him, leaving word that she never intended to return.

This domestic loss does not appear to have much disturbed Wesley's equanimity. He made an entry in his journal at the time, stating his ignorance of the cause of her flight; and he philosophically adds, "Non eam reliqui, non dimisi, non revocabo," which may be translated, "I did not forsake her, I did not dismiss her, I will not recall her." Although Whitefield is not the subject of this biography, he was so closely and affectionately associated with Wesley that it will be of interest to call to mind that he, too, was not happy in his matrimonial alliance. He found the partner he thought he wanted in Mrs. James, a widow of Abergavenny. He has recorded the fact that she was neither rich nor beautiful, and had once been gay. Under the impression that the gift of prophecy had been imparted to him, he announced, when his wife became pregnant, that the child would be a boy, and become a preacher of the gospel. It was

a boy ; and, when publicly baptising him in the tabernacle in the presence of a large congregation, Whitefield devoted the boy solemnly to the service of God. The child died when it was four months old, and his father explained matters by saying that

Satan had been permitted to give him some wrong impressions, whereby he had misapplied several texts of Scripture.

The marriage was not a success ; and, when Mrs. Whitefield died, one of his friends observed that her death “set his mind much at liberty.”

## XI.

WHITEFIELD, whose personal relations with Wesley were close and affectionate to the end, died in 1770, at the age of fifty-four, at Newbury Port, New England. On a certain occasion he had burst into weeping, with the exclamation, "I shall live to be a poor, peevish old man, and everybody will be tired of me!" but he escaped this fate. From a memorandum book in which he entered the times and places of his preaching, it has been calculated that in the thirty-four years of his ministry he preached eighteen thousand sermons, or an average of ten sermons a week. In accordance with his desire he was buried before the pulpit of the Presbyterian church, in the town where he died. All the bells in the town tolled. The ships in the harbour fired mourning guns, and flew their flags half-mast. All the black cloth in the stores in Georgia was bought



up, and the church was hung with black. The governor and the council met at the State House in deep mourning, and went in procession to hear a funeral sermon; and throughout the tabernacles in England funeral honours were paid him.

The human being to whom, of all, John Wesley was probably most tenderly attached, his brother Charles, died in 1788. He was buried in the churchyard at Marylebone, and eight clergymen of the Church of England bore his pall.

Till he was eighty-three John Wesley maintained remarkable vigour of health. At that age he wrote : —

I am a wonder to myself! I am never tired (such is the goodness of God) either with writing, preaching, or travelling. One natural cause, undoubtedly, is my continual exercise and change of air. How the latter contributes to health, I know not; but certainly it does.

Two years later he says : —

I am not so agile as in times past. I do not run or walk as fast as I did. My sight is a little decayed.

In 1790, when eighty-seven, he wrote :—

I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim, my right hand shakes much: my mouth is hot and dry every morning. I have a lingering fever almost every day: my motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God! I do not slack my labours. I can preach and write still.

He preached his last sermon at Leatherhead on February 23, a week before his death, which occurred on March 2, 1791. On Tuesday, March 1, he got up, sat in his chair, and sang the verse beginning, —

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath.

More than once he exclaimed, "The best of all is, God is with us." When his brother's widow wetted his lips, he repeated his thanksgiving after meals :—

We thank Thee, O Lord, for these and all Thy mercies. Bless the Church and King, and grant us truth and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord, for ever and ever.

In the course of the night he kept saying repeatedly, "I'll praise, I'll praise!" At ten o'clock in the morning he died, faintly uttering the word "Farewell," in the presence of his niece, Miss Wesley, and ten other friends. His body lay in state in his great London chapel in the City Road, and as many as ten thousand persons passed through. The funeral service was performed by a Mr. Richardson, one of his preachers. When this gentleman came to that part of the service, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God to take unto Himself the soul of our dear *brother*," his voice changed, and he substituted the word *father*. The congregation hitherto had been shedding tears silently, but at this they burst into loud weeping. At the time of his death the number of his preachers in the British dominions was 313; of members, 76,968. In the United States the number of preachers was 198; and of members, 57,621.

Wesley was a man of very impressive appearance. People who were strongly prejudiced against him have, as soon as they were brought into personal contact with him, been known to change their opinion. Yet he was a small, short, spare man, whose weight over the greater part of his life was about nine stone. Mr. John Hampson, one of his earliest biographers, says of Wesley : —

His face for an old man was one of the finest I have seen. A clear, smooth forehead, an aquiline nose, an eye the brightest and most piercing that can be conceived, and a freshness of complexion scarcely ever to be found at his years and impressive of the most perfect health, conspire to render him a venerable and interesting figure. . . . A narrow plaited stock, a coat with a small upright collar, no buckles at his knees, no silk or velvet in any part of his apparel, and a head as white as snow, gave an idea of something primitive and apostolical; while an air of neatness and cleanliness was diffused over his whole person.

Despite a flow of high spirits, which gave brightness and cheerfulness to his

manner, his dominant tone seems to have been a serene tranquillity, though, taking him in profile, you would judge him to be a man of much acuteness and penetration.

As a preacher, Wesley was incapable of the histrionic modes which came naturally to Whitefield. His attitude in the pulpit was graceful and easy ; and his action was calm and natural, though none the less pleasing and expressive. He had a clear and manly voice, but not a loud one ; and, as my quotations from his writings have shown, his style was singularly clear. With all these personal advantages, however, Mr. Hampson says his spoken sermons varied much in quality, and were at times flat and insipid. But, then, Wesley preached much too often to preach always well. He made it a point, it seems, wherever he was, to preach if he could only manage to stand upon his legs. Exhaustion and want of rest were not seldom respon-

sible for sermons of which it could be said,—

His observations were trite and common, his expositions of Scripture forced and unnatural, and the whole substance disjointed and out of course.

Still, there can be no question that Wesley, when he took pains, was an able preacher. He was, given his premises, logical; and his hearers found him convincing, though always the power was probably more in the man than in the matter. In controversy he showed himself a clear-headed and formidable opponent, who apparently was not hampered by any very fine feeling for the susceptibilities of his adversary. On his bearing in the world Hampson's remarks seem so shrewd and just that I can scarcely do better than quote them in full:—

In social life [he says] Mr. Wesley was lively and conversible, and of exquisite companionable talents. He had been much accustomed to

society, was well acquainted with the rules of good breeding; and in general perfectly attentive and polite. The abstraction of a scholar did not appear in his behaviour. He spoke a good deal in company; and as he had seen much of the world, and in the course of his travels through every corner of the nation had acquired an infinite fund of anecdote and observation, he was not sparing in his communications, and the manner in which he related them was no inconsiderable addition to the entertainment they afforded. His manner in private life was the reverse of cynical or forbidding. It was sprightly and pleasant to the last degree, and presented a beautiful contrast to the austere deportment of many of his preachers and people, who seem to have ranked laughter among the mortal sins. It was impossible to be long in his company without partaking his hilarity. Neither the infirmities of age nor the approach of death had any apparent influence on his manners. His cheerfulness continued to the last, and was as conspicuous at fourscore as at one-and-twenty.

Critics of Mr. Wesley have disputed as to whether ambition and love of power were ruling passions with him. Mr. Hampson asserts it roundly, and Mr. Southey in his *Life of Wesley* follows

in his steps. At a later period he receded from this view. In any case it would seem that Wesley's power and authority over the Methodist connection and its ministers was during the later years of his life absolute. He made what amounts to a claim to infallibility as an interpreter of Scripture, when he introduced his notes on the New Testament and his volumes of sermons into the deeds of the preaching-houses as the test of sound doctrine, and the rule on their conformity to which should depend the admission or continuance of preachers in the connection.

But, taking him generally, there seems no reason to doubt the sincerity of Wesley's conviction that he was a chosen agent for the accomplishment of a great spiritual work among the English people. And, certainly, for the position he quickly obtained as a religious leader he possessed many qualifications. There was a harmony between the man and



his work. It may be questioned even whether, if he had been a man of more enlightenment, he would have been able to do as much as he did towards lifting the English masses out of the brutal depths to which they had sunk. The return from Avernus is proverbially slow and difficult; and, if Wesley had been other than he was, he would not probably have induced so many thousands to move out of the mire and slough of materialism and sensuality and indifferentism at all. In any event, the Evangelical revival in the eighteenth century was a great and far-reaching episode in human history. It was a current counter to the one with which the names of Voltaire and Rousseau are popularly associated, which wrought such appalling mischief in France. While the *bourgeoisie* who were to rule France were being infected with the corruption of a shallow mockery, the English middle classes became more distinctly Chris-

tian than they for some generations had been. The one movement was, we will hope, towards the heights, the other towards depths where are all things foul, slimy, leprous, and hateful. It is not necessary to share John Wesley's prejudices to believe him to have been a man whose life was on the whole of great utility—in view of the times—to the English race on both sides the Atlantic.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY.

There is an immense amount of biographical and other matter dealing with the Wesleys and the leaders of the Evangelical Revival generally. John Wesley's Journals are themselves a huge mine in which his biographers have liberally quarried. In fact, the literature dealing with the sayings and doings of John and Charles Wesley, Whitefield, their contemporaries and successors, would form a considerable library. There is much material, also, for forming an appreciation of the leading lay preachers who co-operated so successfully with the founder of Methodism. I have not space here for this formidable list of books. The following, however, are among the most important biographies which have had John Wesley for their subject.

**I. LIFE OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, A.M.** Including an Account of the

Great Revival of Religion in Europe and America, of which he was the first and chief instrument. By Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore. 8vo. London 1792.

II. LIFE OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A. Collected from his private Papers and printed Works, and written at the request of his executors, to which is prefixed some Account of his Ancestors and Relations; with the Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A., collected from his private Journal and never before published. The whole forming a History of Methodism in which the Principles and Economy of the Methodists are unfolded. Copied chiefly from a London edition published by John Whitehead, M.D. 2 vols. 8vo. Dublin, 1805.

III. MEMOIRS OF THE LATE REV. JOHN WESLEY, A.M. With a Review of his Life and Writings; and a History of Methodism, from its commencement in

1729 to the present time. By John Hampson, A.B. 3vols. 12mo. Sunderland, 1791

IV. THE LIFE OF WESLEY AND THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF METHODISM. By Robert Southey, Esq., Poet Laureate.

V. LIFE AND TIMES OF REV. JOHN WESLEY. (3 vols.) By L. Tyerman.

VI. JOHN WESLEY (Macmillan.) By Julia Wedgwood.

VII. LIFE OF JOHN WESLEY. By John Telford.

